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02/16 1855 Government proposes cooperation programme with ...

STOCKHOLM, Feb 16 (AFP) - The Swedish Social Democratic government on Thursday proposed a new cooperation programme with central and eastern Europe wo th 4.01 billion kronor (534.6 million dollars) to the budget year 1998.

The cooperation programme is aimed primarily at Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Russia, as "Baltic cooperation is significant for the integration of Europe," a press release said.

The government has four main goals for the programme: to strengthen the joint security and democracy in the Baltic Sea region, to improve the environment in the region, and to allow a "socially durable economic transformation," according to the statement.

About 1.7 billion kronor (226.6 million dollars) of the sum concerns the extended, 18-month budget year 1995-1996.

The government defended its proposal for increased cooperation with Russia, in the face of Sweden's condemnation of the events in Chechnya. "We must support economic and political reforms in Russia now more than ever," Minister of Cooperation and Development Pierre Schori said. "The support is devoted to democratic development," he added.